

Beneath

Guardian1

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Summary

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Description:

Vivi has a dilemma. Post-game.

1. Beneath

Beneath

Mirrors.

Vivi hated mirrors.

It was the only thing he would ever hate for telling the truth. Mirrors never lied. They always showed you exactly what you were, exactly what you meant, exactly what you were on the inside and the outside and all the sides they could wish to show.

There was something magic within the glass, too. He knew the old superstition — mirror broken, seven years bad luck — but there was something deeper there, too.

Grandpa had taught him the rhyme:

'Me look at big mirror, me only thinks you see
But me have funny feeling that big mirror watching
me.'

Mikoto had brought it back to him. The Genomes used to love going on trading runs with the black mages. Some were even changing now, growing, living. She'd asked him what it was.

"A mirror," he'd replied weakly, once he'd gotten over the shock.

"Yes, but what is it *for*?"

"Y-you look at yourself in it."

"Oh." The blonde contemplated this for a moment. "I suppose. I used to do that with water."

Water was good. Water was merely reflective of your outer image; it was never meant to show your true self. Water-magic was different, it was natural, it was beautiful. Mirrors, mirror-magic, crafted especially for the purpose of reflection, were far different.

Mirror-magic *dispelled*.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," he said quietly. "Only — only I don't think you should bring mirrors into here any more. Tell the others that, too."

She shrugged, apathetic. “I’m sorry. I’ll have to trade for something else.” That was Mikoto — dry, intelligent, seemingly uncurious. The others were more curious. She chose not to be so.

Vivi waited very carefully until she was gone, then he went into his little hut. He closed the door behind him, set the mirror down on his bed, then pulled a little stool up against the door. Nobody had locks in the black mage village.

Then, for some perverse reason, he set the mirror down again and looked into it.

I look into the mirror, and I only think I see...

There was an old myth about black mages. If you tried to take their hats off and looked into their eyes, your soul was sucked away.

People said they were abominations.

Oh, if only they *knew*.

But I have a funny feeling...

Made out of darkness and dust, they said. The children of the Mist. What was left when the Mist boiled down, like saltwater in a pot. Spun out of cobwebs and nightmares with fire for eyes.

And that was so long ago, before all the black mages had died out, their secrets lost with them. All the black mages of old were now only pictures in dusty textbooks.

If only they *knew*...

That the mirror's watching me.

Vivi slowly pulled off his stained, scarred gloves. There were shiny spots on them where he'd sometimes had to beat out flames. His gloves were more skin to him than anything else; the only skin he'd ever known. No, the only skin he'd ever wanted to know.

The mirror echoed him, the reflection pulling gloves off hands.

Vivi had nice hands, long tapered fingers, though the colour of corpses from never being exposed to the sun. They had gotten less chubby and rounded than when he had last been unafraid to look at them, a few years ago — now they were bigger, a different shape. His hands were weak, though; black mages did not rely on the power of their fists.

He'd hoped he had been the only one like this, but he had not. The Black Waltz One had been the same, though cruelly misshapen; Black Waltz Two

was also a mimic, though his livid scars spoke of other, crueller things; Black Waltz Three had been the worst. He'd been exactly like *him*.

For after all, he could see. Vivi could dispel, too.

He and the mirror were one and the same.

I look into the mirror, and I only think I see...

He wondered ironically that, if he took off his hat and looked at the reflection, his soul would be sucked out of his body; sort of like a cockatrice, turned against himself.

Then he sadly realized already that every time he looked, his soul died a little anyway.

Trembling just a little, Vivi closed his lamplight eyes and tried to get his composure back. The little heatrush of magic passed him as he drew his hand over his face.

But I have a funny feeling...

Vivi's hands trembled as they removed his hat and put it down on the bed, next to the mirror. The hat clinched it; shielded his face and his neck, helped with the illusion. What with the perpetual darkness covering his face and the wide brim of the

hat, Vivi lived his life looking through a perpetual tint.

...that the mirror's watching...

Kuja's face stared back at him, young and wide-eyed, panic in the pupils of the topaz-coloured eyes. This face was even paler than Kuja's, slightly gaunt, with none of the delicate care that the former had used to put into it. His long hair was bound in a tight topknot on top of his head, long dull fair hair, the colour of milky tea.

For he had been the last of the four, and Kuja had wanted perfection. Oh, how he had laughed; he'd been in a good mood when he'd created the fourth mage.

All of the Four had his face. The condition of the face depended on how much of a mood he'd been in that day.

Of course, he had expected none of them to see, to understand, to realize before they died and wasted away in a pile of feathers and cloth. But he had not expected Vivi to run away, either.

He'd known when he'd seen him, though. And Vivi had known immediately. A stranger with his face, and he'd realized everything.

Crying by now, gasping choking sobs, Vivi grabbed the mirror in a tight fit of agonized burning rage and flung it against the wall. It shattered into millions of bright little winking shards, each one always showing somebody else's face with his soul looking out, even with the glamour of the black mist over his face.

The mirror showed his true reflection — but that was all it was, a reflection. They were the same, Vivi and the mirror; only a reflection of something all too real.

Grabbing his hat and cramming it down over his face, and because he was still very young and still altogether too old, Vivi curled up into a little ball and cried underneath his bed.

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